

Let me be clear. Like all Americans, I too am eager to bring our troops home. I do not want them to remain in Iraq or anywhere else for a day longer than necessary. But I also agree with our military commanders in Iraq who were nearly unanimous in their belief that some U.S. forces, approximately 20,000, should remain for a period of time to help the Iraqis secure the hard-earned gains that we had made together.

All of our top commanders in Iraq, by the way, chosen by the President of the United States—all of our top commanders in Iraq—General Petraeus, General Odierno, General Austin, all of them believed we needed to maintain a presence of U.S. troops there, and they consistently made that clear to many of us during our repeated visits to Iraq.

On February 3, the commander of U.S. forces in Iraq, GEN Lloyd Austin, and U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Jim Jeffrey testified to the Committee on Armed Services that for all of the progress the Iraqi security forces had made in recent years—and it has been substantial—they still have critical gaps in their capabilities that will endure beyond this year. Those shortcomings included enabling functions for counterterrorism operations, the control of Iraq's airspace, and other external security missions, intelligence collection and fusion, training and sustainment of the force.

Our commanders wanted U.S. troops to remain in Iraq beyond this year to continue assisting Iraqi forces in filling these gaps in their capabilities. Indeed, Iraqi commanders believed the exact same thing. In August, the chief of staff of Iraq's armed forces could not have been any clearer. He said:

The problem will start after 2011. The politicians must find other ways to fill the void after 2011. If I were asked about the withdrawal, I would say to politicians, the U.S. Army must stay until the Iraqi Army is fully ready in 2020.

During repeated travels to Iraq with my colleagues, I have met with all of the leaders of Iraq's major political blocs, and they too said they would support keeping a presence of U.S. troops in Iraq. So let's be clear. This is what our commanders recommended, it is what Iraqi commanders recommended, and it is what all of Iraq's key political leaders said privately that they were prepared to support. So what happened? What happened?

Advocates of withdrawal are quick to point out that the current security arrangement which requires all U.S. troops to be out of Iraq by the end of this year was concluded by the Bush administration. That is true. But it is also beside the point. The authors of that agreement always intended for it to be renegotiated at a later date to allow some U.S. forces to remain in Iraq.

As former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, whose State Department team negotiated the security agreements, has said:

There was an expectation that we would negotiate something that looked like a residual force for our training with the Iraqis. Everybody believed it would be better if there was some kind of residual force.

So if that is not the reason, I ask again: What happened? The prevailing narrative is that the U.S. and Iraqi leaders could not reach agreement over the legal protections needed to keep our troops in Iraq. To be sure, this was a matter of vital importance. But while this may have been a reason for our failure, the privileges and immunities issues are less causes than symptoms of the larger reason we could not reach agreement with the Iraqis. Because of his political promise to fully withdraw from Iraq, the President never brought the full weight of his office to bear in shaping the politics and the events on the ground in Iraq so as to secure a residual presence of U.S. troops. This left our commanders and our negotiators in Baghdad mostly trying to respond to events in Iraq, trying to shape events without the full influence of the American President behind them.

Last May, I traveled to Iraq with the Senator from South Carolina, Mr. GRAHAM. We met with all of the major Iraqi leaders. All of them were ready to come to an agreement on a future presence of U.S. troops in Iraq. But as Prime Minister Malaki explained to us, the administration at that time and for the foreseeable future had not given the Iraqi Government a number of troops and missions that it would propose to keep in Iraq.

For weeks after, the administration failed to make a proposal to the Iraqis, and when the Iraqis finally united in August and publicly asked the administration to begin negotiations, the response from Washington was again characterized by delay. This ensured that a serious negotiation could not begin much less succeed.

I know Iraq is a sovereign country. I know it has an elected government that must answer to public opinion. I know there could be no agreement over a future U.S. military presence in Iraq if Iraqis did not agree to it and build support for it. So this is as much a failure of Iraqi leadership as it is of American leadership. But to blame this on the Iraqis does not excuse the fact that we had an enormous amount of influence with Iraq's leaders and we did not exercise it to the fullest extent possible to achieve an outcome that was in our national security interest.

In fact, in the view of many, they deliberately refused to come up with a number. They deliberately refused to engage in serious negotiation with the Iraqis, with the ultimate purpose of fulfilling the Presidents's campaign pledge that he would get all U.S. troops out of Iraq.

That is not a violation of sovereignty. That is diplomacy, that is leadership. Leaders must shape events and public opinion not just respond to them, and starting in early 2009, from their desire to accelerate our with-

drawal from Iraq faster than our commanders recommended, to their hands-off approach to the Iraqi process of government formation last year, to their record of delay and passivity on the question of maintaining a presence of U.S. troops beyond this year, this administration has consistently failed at the highest level to lead on Iraq.

I say again, perhaps this outcome should not have been a surprise. It is what the President has consistently promised to do, and that decision makes good political sense for this President. But such decisions should not be determined by domestic politics. The brave Americans who have fought so valiantly and have given so much did so not for political reasons but for the safety and security of their fellow citizens, for their friends, for their families, for their children's future, and for us.

This is a decisive moment in the history of America's relationship with Iraq and with all of the countries of the broader Middle East. This is a moment when the substantial influence we have long enjoyed in that part of the world could be receding—in fact, it is receding. We cannot allow that to be our Nation's future. We must continue to lead. We must not let short-term political gains dictate our longer term goals. We need to continue working to shape a freer, more just, and more secure future for both Iraq and for people across the Middle East, for it is in our own national security interest to do so.

Over 4,000 brave, young Americans gave their lives in this conflict. I hope and I pray—regardless of these decisions made in large part for political reasons—that their sacrifice was not in vain. I hope their families will not mourn the day their sons and daughters went out to fight for freedom for the Iraqi people.

Unfortunately, it is clear that this decision of a complete pullout of U.S. troops from Iraq was dictated by politics and not our national security interests. I believe history will judge this President's leadership with the scorn and disdain it deserves.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

KEYSTONE XL PROJECT

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, the House yesterday passed a bill that included an effort to move forward on the Keystone XL Pipeline project, and I wish to talk about that project for a while today and American energy generally.

We all agree private sector job creation needs to be the No. 1 priority in Washington. One of the best ways to jump-start job creation is simply

through good energy projects. The shortest path to more American jobs is more American energy.

Unfortunately, the President and the administration have delayed one of the largest domestic, shovel-ready projects until after the election next year. This is a project that is ready to go. The States this project would go through have cleared the way for the project. There is no government money involved. This just takes a government OK, saying: Yes, it is all right to create these jobs. These jobs not only have the short-term impact of creating the jobs that are created to build the pipeline but the long-term impact of all the economic activity that occurs because of this new North American energy to which we would have access. In delaying this program, the President is simply stalling the creation of thousands of jobs and postponing not only the growth in our economy but also a move toward more energy security.

Not too many years ago, I don't think one could say with a straight face that we need to do everything we can to create something that closely resembles energy independence. We are in a situation now with North American energy where we can do that. The numbers on the Keystone XL project speak for themselves.

This project would create 20,000 direct jobs during the construction phase—20,000 jobs. That is why the labor union movement in the country supports this project. Twenty thousand jobs to build the pipeline. It would generate \$20.9 billion in new private sector spending. It would generate around \$5 billion in new State, local, and Federal revenue when this project is being built and when this project is completed. Nationwide, the project would benefit 1,400 American job creators.

The Keystone XL project would also help reinforce America's energy security by reducing our dependence on other parts of the world. With Canada, our largest trading partner, it is a miracle relationship, this large border that we don't worry very much about, all the back-and-forth economic activity that occurs. In fact, for every \$1 we would send to Canada for that energy, they would send 91 cents back. So this is \$1 we are spending to get 91 cents back, to be more of an energy partner with our closest neighbor—we have clearly a bigger border with Canada than we do with Mexico—to be an energy partner with our closest neighbor rather than to worry about energy in places where, frankly, they don't like us very well. If they do like us, they don't get the money back to us in the same way.

In fact, by comparison, of the 91 cents we would get back for every \$1 we send to Canada for North American energy coming out of Canada, we get 49 cents back from Saudi Arabia. That doesn't mean Saudi Arabia is a bad trading partner. It just means they are not as good a trading partner as the Canadians are. We get 33 cents back

from Venezuela. So why would we want to send \$1 to Venezuela or \$1 to Saudi Arabia for energy if we could send \$1 to Canada and almost all of that \$1 comes right back to us?

Domestically, this project would help encourage more oil production in the Bakken formation in the Upper Great Plains. The Bakken formation—which I sure didn't know about 15 years ago and I don't know that anybody did—is thought to be the greatest new energy development since Prudhoe Bay in the 1960s. I read somewhere the other day that North Dakota has become the fourth or fifth energy-producing State in the country, passing Oklahoma. This is a great resource right at the incoming border of where this new pipeline and all this energy activity would be.

Regardless of the White House's decision to delay this project, the Canadian oil sands will be developed. It is not a question of whether there is going to be a market; it is who gets the market. The Canadians have said, as they should: If we don't build a pipeline through the United States to the refineries in the Southern part of the United States, we are going to build that same pipeline in another direction. Most likely, the pipeline will go to the Pacific coast and then the energy goes to Asia.

Why would we want energy going to Asia from a trading partner where we get 91 cents back rather than energy coming here? Why would we want to buy more energy from the Middle East and less energy than we could buy from our neighbor? Why would we think for a minute that the energy security of the country would be better served in any other way than this one?

So this is going to most likely go to Asia. If it doesn't go to Asia, I guess it can go to the Atlantic coast and go to Europe. But what everybody believes is, if it doesn't come here, they just turn the pipeline to the west instead of the south, and those oil sands, that great energy resource goes somewhere else rather than where it makes more sense for us to get it or more sense for them to send it.

This is as close to an energy no-brainer as I can think of. But the majority leader says this project is dead on arrival in the Senate. I don't believe he meant just dead on arrival if it was part of a package that extended the payroll tax. I think the quote was: "It is dead on arrival." It is not going to go anywhere in the coming year, at a time when we need those jobs. Eventually, we all know as quickly as we can get it, we need to be more dependent on North American energy and less dependent on energy everywhere else.

There have been many reports that say the administration's timing is in consideration for the reelection effort. This appears to be about one American job instead of more American jobs, and we need to be concerned about more American jobs.

Some reports have noted that the President's advisers "fear that a deci-

sion in favor of the project could dampen enthusiasm among volunteers needed for door-to-door campaigning in battleground States."

I thought that bus went to battleground States. That should be enough to get to battleground States. We shouldn't have to worry about not having these volunteers because we choose to do what makes sense for us in the energy situation.

Others have noted that "the President decided to punt on this project in order to placate parts of the coalition that elected him in 2008."

Americans are looking for jobs, not more of the same from Washington. This isn't time for politics. We need to jump-start the private sector economy. Again, I will say, the quickest road to more American jobs is more American energies.

For the better part of 60 years, we have used more energy than we could produce. The marketplace is there. The consumer is there. The user is there. This is what capitalism is all about. It is what free enterprise is all about, figuring out how to connect the product with the consumer. So we know the consumer is there. Let's do what we can to connect that consumer with the energy needs they have.

According to a Gallup poll, the sharp decline in the workforce last month may have more of a reflection on the large number of Americans deciding to give up looking for work. Let's do things that energize the economy and energize the American workforce.

I am glad to be a sponsor of the North American Energy Security Act. The House again pursued this week a similar policy as part of their effort to vote on a payroll tax extension, with this as an effort to create new jobs. Whether it is the Keystone Pipeline or the Utility MACT rule that slows down people's decisions to make a job-creating decision or other EPA rules and potential rules that make people think twice and three times and eventually enough times you don't do it about job creation or what we need to do to get to the oil and gas shale reserves of the country or oil in the Gulf of Mexico, let's do what is necessary for North America. Let's make North American energy work for America. I don't know a better way to do that at less government cost or less government involvement than the Keystone Pipeline.

I yield the floor and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. COONS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

PAYROLL TAX CUT

Mr. COONS. Mr. President, I rise to share a feeling that many in my home